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ABSTRACT

This handbook presents guidelines for establishing adult education programs in county jails while simultaneously describing the establishment of an adult education program in the Bell County Jail in Texas in 1980. The three chapters of the handbook describe the preliminary planning, staff selection, and curriculum development and delivery stages of the Bell County Jail program, which was designed to accomplish the following goals: motivate and inspire both long- and short-term students; offer a diversified curriculum based upon student needs; provide diagnostic testing and General Educational Development (GED) certification; and deliver basic skills remediation in reading, writing, and mathematics. In addition, the second chapter lists 12 steps on planning and implementing an adult education program in a county jail, and the third chapter offers 12 guidelines for establishing a student-centered curriculum and evaluating a county jail education program. (MN)

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A HANDBOOK

FOR

ESTABLISHING ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN COUNTY JAILS OF TEXAS

by

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CHAPTER 1

Sometimes five year goals take fifteen years to accomplish. Perhaps this is what should be expected when the goal involves changing some of the traditional ways of a two hundred year old system such as the local county jail. Perhaps, also, since assistance from area schools is necessary for accomplishment of the goal, time is necessary to develop awareness of the relationship between numbers of students who drop out of school and county jail populations. Considering the advocacy of early statesmen such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson for universal education for American youth, and reflecting upon reluctance of the public to accept those views, perhaps fifteen years of effort to establish education programs in the county jails of Texas is just a good beginning.

Although education programs have existed in penitentiaries for many years and some fine educational/vocational programs operate in larger county jails having 300 or more inmates, little has been done to establish needed programs of education in small county jails of the state. The magnitude of the problem is clear when it is considered that most county jail inmates are young, lacking a high school degree, and charged with minor infractions of the law. The opportunity for rehabilitation is open for saving taxpayers thousands of dollars by providing education which can actually prevent penitentiary terms for youthful offenders. Ninety percent of Texas county jails do not offer such programs, although efforts to establish them began many years ago.

In the fall of 1969, two probation officers in Nueces County, Texas talked over the possibility of adding some educational goals to the practice of "jail house therapy." They felt that this was one way for probation officers to get the attention of wayward charges. Probation officers would,

in some cases, have the wayward probationer arrested for minor violation of probation rules and placed in the county jail for a few weeks in hope that the temporary denial of freedom would effect change. Then, the probationer's charge of violation of probation would be dropped, and he, or she, would be allowed to continue on probation. The two probation officers believed that contemplative time in jail could be enhanced if an educational program providing counseling, diagnosis, and remediation could be introduced to the jail setting. This would certainly provide an alternative to probationers as well as a means of alleviating over-crowded conditions in the state prisons.

Armed with this enlightened idea, the Nueces County chief probation officer met with the county sheriff and explained his proposal. Initially, the idea was turned down, but the next year, the sheriff was approached again with the added notion that such a rehabilitative program might attract votes. This time, the idea met with success, and a program was established in the Nueces County Jail.

The efforts to establish educational programs in county jails of Texas have extended over a fifteen year period. Establishing a number of small, though poorly equipped programs in South Texas jails, Allen Baca sought to demonstrate validity of his idea. As a member of the Texas Jail Commission, he was instrumental in getting a law passed to provide education programs in all county jails of Texas. Later, as an employee of the Texas Department of Community Affairs, he continued to develop a plan for state-wide jail education programs. In 1980, he became involved in establishment of the Bell County Adult Education Program operated in the jail through the auspices of Central Texas College.

CHAPTER 2

The planning and implementation of an education program in the Bell County Jail began with concern of county and school officials about the number of inmates who had not completed high school. The program was also established to comply with Texas Law, passed in 1976, requiring educational programs in Texas county jails. Texas Commission on Jail Standards inspectors began to note existence of education and/or library facilities in county jails, threatening withdrawal of jail certification unless counties took action to comply with the law.

Simultaneous concern of county officials over growth of the jail population and of area school officials over increasing droput rates influenced establishment of the Bell County Jail Adult Education Program in 1980. During a 34 year tenure, Sheriff Lester Gunn saw the jail population grow from three to 130 and the jail staff from five to 76. School officials from Temple, alarmed by the loss of approximately two hundred students from high school in the early seventies, established an alternative secondary school program for dropout prevention in 1976. Intended to give students in trouble another chance, remediation, extra counseling, and various kinds of personal and family assistance, this program reduced the dropout rate from 240 in the 1976-1977 school year to 143 in the 1977-1978 school year. Even with assistance from the alternative program, school officials felt that far too many students were dropping out of high school with inadequate skills for getting and holding a job. Awareness of the relationship between dropout rates and the county jail population led to a meeting of Bell county officials and area school administrators and adult educators.

Now a model program which has served over 1,200 students, the Bell County Jail Adult Education Program began with the initial planning meeting of the sheriff and members of the jail staff, area school administrators and adult educators, and County Judge John Garth. Judge Garth, a former school principal, supported establishment of an education program in the Bell County Jail. Assisted by the Central Texas Council of Governments and Central Texas College, which was to sponsor the program, Judge Garth and other county and school officials laid the foundation for the existing Bell County Jail Adult Education Program. Two adult educators, selected to offer a few hours of instruction each week, also attended the preliminary planning meeting, facilitating their understanding of the joint community support for the project. Their participation also ensured their knowledge of potential problems.

The selection of the teachers for the Bell County Program was done very carefully. One instructor had an extensive background in counseling and corrections and was, thus, aware of general operation of a jail. The other instructor had extensive experience in teaching and supervision at all levels of instruction and was a certified reading specialist. In addition, this instructor had helped to establish the alternative secondary school program for dropout prevention for the Temple Independent School District. The importance of careful teacher selection is a major concern for establishing successful adult education programs in county jails.

Based upon plans made at the initial planning meeting for the Bell County Adult Education Program, its major goals were to:

(1) motivate and inspire both long-term and short-term students,

(2) offer a diversified curriculum based upon student needs,

(3) provide diagnostic testing and GED certification, and

(4) provide basic skills remediation in reading, math, and writing.

The Temple Independent School District assisted program implementation through provision of checked out books, films, tapes, Systems 80 software, and other supplies and materials. Basic supplies of paper, pencils, and other materials came from Central Texas College adult education funds. Because minimal funds were available for supplies and materials, community groups were approached by the instructors for help. Churches, area colleges, the Half-Price Book Store of Temple, and the Altrusa Club of Temple provided hundreds of dollars worth of supplies, materials, and books. A library and type of learning center was established with donations from such community groups. Initially, the library was used for group instruction. Later, however, it was found that teachers could work as easily with students in the dormitory setting although they (and the students) preferred the learning environment of the library.

From inception, the teachers made every effort to become acquainted with the jail staff. They consciously worked toward communicating the fact that they did not wish the program to impede any of the normal work functions of the staff. They also wished to convey the idea that they were forming a sort of partnership with jail staff members in providing a service which would improve morale of inmates and thus reduce problems for corrections people. In addition, it was recognized from the outset that the assistance of jail staff members was crucial to the success of the program. They are needed to take teachers to various parts of the jail and to help in moving supplies and materials to areas of instruction. Also, jail staff members can help to publicize educational services offered by a program. They can assist in recruiting candidates for GED examination and training offered through the Job Training Partnership Act.

As the teachers worked with students in the Bell County Program, special needs were recognized. Glasses were provided for one young woman by a church group. Clothing and personal care needs were donated by members of the Altrusa Club of Temple. In order to keep the community informed of this innovative project and to elicit continuing support, the teachers and the county judge were available for speaking engagements. As the numbers of students served grew to hundreds, the Texas Education Agency was contacted so that on-site General Educational Development (GED) examination could begin in 1983.

Soon to enter its sixth year of operation, the Bell County Jail Adult Education Program has been presented as a working model at state adult education and International Reading Association conferences as well as at a national IRA conference. Since inception in 1980, over a thousand students have been served. Since implementation of on-site GED testing, between three and four hundred students are served each year by the examiner and the two part-time instructors offering four hours of teaching and testing each week. The community has recognized that this program has been effective in reaching high school dropouts at a level of incarceration where many are charged with minor infractions and are eager for a helping hand. A follow-up study has documented the fact that forty-seven former students found the program helpful in completing high school and in finding employment or continuing in school.

In summary, the steps for planning and implementation of an adult education program in a county jail site are:

(1) Area school officials need to study dropout rates.
(2) Sheriffs need to poll inmates to determine the level of high school dropouts in jail.
(3) Some key person (such as a county judge, sheriff, or educator) should

arrange for a meeting of county and school officials to study the possibility of establishing an education program in the county jail.

(4) This key person should facilitate an open meeting so that questions can be raised and addressed, potential problems are circumvented, and major goals are established.

(5) Carefully selected instructors should attend the initial planning meeting.

(6) A sponsor for the program (area college, school district, or adult education co-op) should be found.

(7) Source(s) of supplies and materials must be discussed.

(8) Plans must be made for a library/learning center.

(9) Donations of books and periodicals for the library must be elicited from community groups.

(10) Community relations must be cultivated continuously so that the project is the result of a team effort.

(11) From inception, there must be an open line of communication between teachers and jail staff, the sheriff, and the county judge.

(12) Records must be kept to provide evidence of numbers of students served, tests administered, and GED certificates earned.

CHAPTER 3

From inception, the Bell County Adult Education Program has been student-centered. The instructors encourage students to seek their own potential through goal-setting, to respect themselves and others, and to think positively. Students are encouraged to consider obstacles to achieving their goals, to think about how much school or training would be needed to attain them, and to assess how hard they would be willing to work for achievement. Emphasis upon student needs and wants, focusing upon personal encouragement and involvement of the instructors, is based upon motivational strategies proven effective by research. Studies in American and British secondary schools show that teacher strategies, personal interest, use of rewards, and the learning atmosphere strongly affect students' attitudes toward learning and their willingness to participate responsibly in education.

A diverse curriculum has been developed according to what students say they want and need. Materials, visual aids, and discussions deal with such subjects as job training, problem-solving, drug abuse, interpersonal relationships, and consumer education. Films and filmstrips addressing these subjects are obtained without cost from the Texas Department of Health and from the Stephen F. Austin Technical Assistance Center Library.

Minimal ninth grade reading skills are needed for successful performance on the GED examinations. Therefore, potential candidates are given a Gates McGinitie Reading Test to determine individual reading level. GED study materials are provided for those students possessing skills for success on the examinations. Remedial study materials are provided for students scoring below ninth grade. The Systems 80 materials are used for review of specific reading and math skills. Out-of-adoption textbooks

donated from area schools are offered for remediation. The instructors offer individual assistance, when requested, in areas of particular problem, but, generally, the responsibility for learning is placed squarely upon the shoulders of the students.

Books and periodicals are available from the library in a wide range of reading levels. Paperback books, comic books, newspapers, and even catalgues are used to stimulate students' desire to read. The instructors encourage students to think of reading like swimming. The more they do, the better they will get at the task. The instructors also encourage reading of books purchased specifically for purposes of bibliotherapy, or self-help. Such books present high interest, problem-solving stories for, and about, young people.

On various occasions, resource persons from the community have come to offer information about technical schools, job training programs, and to direct group counseling or art instruction. Periodically, the instructors have published a Bell County Adult Education Newspaper featuring writing and drawing of students participating in the program. Special certificates of achievement from Central Texas College are given in recognition for completion of special projects and study programs.

On any given Saturday afternoon, students in the Bell County Jail Adult Education Program may be engaged in discussion, individual study, or testing. Time which might have been wasted is spent in positive, productive activities thus improving morale and accomplishing other goals of changing human behavior. Often, resentment, despair, or anger are replaced by enthusiasm, hope, and thoughtfulness. One student may request a book on accounting, another a book of history, and a third a collection of poetry.

In order to assure tailoring of the curriculum to student needs, continuous evaluation is sought by the instructors. Comments of jail staff members are also valued. Annually, a report concerning numbers of students served and tested and student reactions is made to the Texas Education Agency. At the end of the first four years, the instructors designed a survey instrument which was sent to 108 former Bell County students to determine the long-term impact of the program. Forty-seven former students responded, indicating that, although GED examinations were not offered on-site until 1983, between 60 and 70 percent earned GED certificates after leaving jail because of encouragement offered by the program. Over 85 percent of the former students believed that the educational services had a long-term effect upon their lives with regard to work possibilities, family, and community life. In ranking order, the former students concluded that the three most important long-term effects of the program were learning to set goals, to think positively, and to be motivated to work toward solution of a personal, financial, educational, or health problem.

The Bell County followup study indicated that over 60 percent of the former students participated in the program only one time. Only three of the forty-seven returned to instruction once after leaving the program, and only five returned more than once. This seems to indicate that the Bell County Adult Education Program may have had a very real impact upon recidivism.

Steps to establishing a student-centered curriculum and evaluation of a county jail education program include the following:

(1) Instructors must familiarize themselves with needs and wants of the students.
(2) Assistance from jail staff members must be elicited so that special requests can be addressed.

(3) Instructors must recognize that motivation of the students is a primary concern. They must begin at the emotional and educational level where each student finds himself and begin to build.
(4) Diverse materials should be gathered in the library or learning center, including appropriate films, filmstrips, books, reading tests, paper, pencils, award certificates, and individualized kits.
(5) Periodicals and the newspaper should be provided to entice students to read. Catalogues and comic books may be used for this purpose, too.
(6) Local churches or community groups may fund rental of a Systems 80 Machine for use in remediation of basic reading and math.
(7) Resource persons from the community should be invited to assist in instruction. Always, prior arrangements must be made with the sheriff and jail staff.
(8) Donations of supplies and materials, books, personal care items, glasses, and clothing can link community concern to the program.
(9) Continuous evaluation must be conducted to ensure meeting the needs and wants of the students.
(10) A formal followup study can document effectiveness of the program after a few years of operation.
(11) Technical assistance in program operation can be obtained through the Texas Education Agency.
(12) Special problems can be discussed with instructors of the Bell County Program as they arise.

It is hoped, in conclusion, that this handbook will be helpful to adult educators and county officials hoping to establish a jail education program. It has been prepared to document sequential steps which have been helpful in successful operation of the Bell County Adult Education Program. There will be a need for communication as program replication occurs so that the tremendous need for adult education in county jails can be most effectively met.